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Historic Houses and Personages of Centerville

BY MRS. HELEN V. AUSTIN

(*From papers of the Wayne County Historical Society*)

WHITEWATER COLLEGE.

THE history of Whitewater College, founded by the Methodist Episcopal church in 1853, might fill a volume, but it can only be given mere mention here. It was a great school, and many prominent men were teachers here, among them Dr. Cyrus Nutt, George B. Joslyn, Dr. Edwards, H. N. Barnes and Prof. A. C. Shortridge.

Previous to the establishment of the college, a county seminary occupied the ground. In 1827 the west wing was built and in 1842, when more room was needed, an east wing was added. The two buildings were connected by a covered passage way. Afterwards, when the college took the place of the seminary, the central part of the college occupied the passage way, with the former seminary buildings as west and east wings. Rev. Samuel K. Houshour taught in the old seminary in the west wing. Among the teachers in the east wing, were Miss Mary Thorp, Miss Sarah Dickenson and Rawson Vaile. Among the pupils of after fame was Lew Wallace, and there are those who remember how the future soldier, diplomat and author was once roundly flogged by Mr. Hoshour. After the decline of the college, the building was sold, in 1870, to the school trustees and became the public school building. It was destroyed by fire in 1891 and was succeeded by the present fine public school house. At the foot of Main Cross Street stands the ruins of a brick school house where many of the older citizens received a part of their education.

CHURCHES.

The first church organization here was the Methodist Episcopal. When the county seat was pulled up by the roots at Salisbury and transplanted at Centerville, the Methodist church came with it. There had been no church building at Salisbury, the congregation having met in the court house, and prior to the building of a meeting house here the congregation met at the houses of members.

In 1828 a frame church was built. It was situated east of where the Christian church now stands and fronted on the east. Mr. N. Parrott's stable now occupies the spot where the church stood. There was a street north of the county buildings, where there is now an alley, which led to the church from the west. The parsonage was on the church grounds, west of the church, and stood there after the church was torn away. It was moved to Walnut street and is now the home of Mr. Dearth. In 1834 the conference, then comprising the entire State, was held in this church, the venerable Bishop Roberts presiding. In the year 1842 the present brick church was completed. It was at that time not only the finest Methodist church in the State, but the finest one in the State belonging to any church organization. Upon the completion of the new church in 1842 conference was again held here. Bishop Simpson dedicated the church and presided at the conference. In 1882 the building underwent repairs and was re-dedicated by the Rev. A. Marine.

It must be remembered that although the Friends were not the first to form a society in the town, they were the first religious society in the township and organized the West Grove meeting in 1813, three miles north west of Centerville, and built a log meeting house. Thus the leaven of the old church at West Grove, has been leavening ever since.

The Cumberland Presbyterian church was organized in 1842, Rev. LeRoy Woods, officiating. Mr. Woods was the pastor for several years and was succeeded by Elam McCord. A Sunday-school was organized in connection with the church. For some time after the organization, meetings were held in the Methodist church. In 1849 the congregation built a church on the west side of north Main Cross Street, which is now the Knights of Pythias hall.

The Disciples or Christian church was organized about 1832. A Baptist church had existed earlier. The old meeting house was situated some distance north of where the railroad station now is. About 1837 the baptist organization disbanded and a greater part of the members united with the Christian church. The present Christian church was erected in 1878.

The Presbyterian church was organized in 1866. The first services were held in Snider Hall, the present town hall. In

1868 the congregation erected the brick church on south Main Cross street. Chief among the zealous members of the church was Mrs. Kate U. Johnson, wife of Judge Nimrod Johnson and the mother of Henry U. and Robert U. Johnson, and it was through her efforts as a solicitor and contributor that the church was built. After the removal of the county seat and the decline of the town, the church was purchased by the Friends and is now their house of worship.

PUBLIC HOUSES.

The early hotels or taverns were important institutions in the pioneer days. Rachel Neal is said to have been the first inn-keeper. There are people now living who remember Mrs. Neal, but where her inn was situated I have not been able to learn.

The old Major Gay tavern opposite the public square, where there is now a livery stable, was fitted up in 1834, by Thomas G. Noble, and occupied by him for several years. General Samuel DeLong succeeded Mr. Noble for several years.

In 1830 William Elliott built the frame hotel on the south-east corner of the public square, and occupied it until 1835. John Hutchinson succeeded Mr. Elliott and kept an excellent house. In 1838 Daniel Lashley, with his mother and younger brother Alfred, purchased the tavern. Among all the hotel keepers of Wayne county none were more favorably known than the Lashleys. They continued in the business, in the same house, for many years. It was headquarters for many of the prominent men of the legal profession. Judge Perry, of Richmond, always made it his home when attending court. It was a home-like, well-ordered, excellent hotel. Mr. Lashley was the best of hosts. The Lashley house was moved from the public square some years ago to where it now stands, a few squares east of the old location. A fine brick residence occupies the site. This was built for the sheriff's house, and is now the residence of the Frazier brothers and Miss Frazier. The old Lashley house is now a private residence. John King was the last to keep it as a hotel. In 1833 John Dorsey fitted up the large frame building nearly opposite the bank, for a hotel and occupied it for some time. He was succeeded by John Allison, Abbott W. Bowers and John Winders. Solomon Brumfield bought the

property and occupied it. Under his management it was well kept.

In 1837 Henry Rowan fitted up a small tavern east of the public square and kept it several years. He afterwards erected a three-story hotel building adjoining, which is now the residence of Lloyd K. Hill.

Samuel Hannah kept the American house, on the south-west corner of Main street. He was a merchant, also, and had his store in the corner room. Later, the American House was kept by Emsley Hamm, T. L. Rowan and others. The building is now owned by Simon McConaha.

The Jones House is the last in the line of the old hostelries. The south half was built by Emsley Hamm. The north half was built by Daniel Shank. Subsequently Mr. Hamm bought the north part from Mr. Shank, and kept a hotel for some years. He afterwards sold the house to Dr. C. J. Woods and moved to Economy, and upon his return to Centerville kept the American House for two years. Norris Jones who succeeded Mr. Hamm gave the name to the house and for several years kept an excellent, though small hotel.

Samuel Hannah, although at one time a hotel keeper and merchant filled many important places. He was a man of distinction. The young people who compiled a Who-When-What book,* had some trouble not to confuse him with the other Samuel Hanna of Indiana, who lived at Ft. Wayne. There is a difference in the spelling of the name. The Who-When-What book gives a brief sketch of our Samuel Hannah: "A pioneer of Wayne county; member of the Society of Friends; conspicuous for opposition to the collection of the fines from Quakers who refused to do military duty. A native of Delaware, born December 1, 1789, Mr. Hannah came Indiana as a young man; served as sheriff of Wayne county; a member of the Legislature; was Justice of the Peace and member of the county board; was appointed Post master of Centerville by John Quincy Adams and removed by Andrew Jackson, in pursuance of the Marcy proclamation, "To the victors belong the spoils." He was one of the commissioners appointed to locate the Michigan road, the great highway authorized from Lake Michigan to the Ohio

*A book of brief biographies compiled by the *Indianapolis Press* some years ago.

river; also a commissioner to select the lands to be ceded to the State by an Indian treaty. Afterward Mr. Hanna was a member of the Legislature and Treasurer of the State; removed to Indianapolis in 1847; became interested in railroad construction and improvements; was first treasurer of the Indiana Central Railroad Company. He died September 8, 1869. Mr. Hannah possessed the rugged elements of strength and manhood which qualify men for frontier life; for developing the material resources and building a commonwealth on justice and liberty."

The red brick school house opposite to Mr. Lashley's was the home of Judge John C. Kibbey, who was so well known here and at Richmond. The place is now the home of Mr. Andrew Dunbar.

The brick house on the corner west of the Trumbull residence was built by Rawson Vaile, a teacher in the old seminary and also a teacher in Richmond. He was a brother of Dr. Joel Vaile, of Richmond, a prominent physician and public school trustee, after whom one of the school houses of Richmond is named.

Judge Nimrod Johnson bought the Vaile property and this was the Johnson homestead for many years. Here Henry U. and Robert U. Johnson spent their boyhood. Judge Johnson was not only eminent in the legal profession, but he was a man of vast literary knowledge. Mrs. Johnson was Miss Kate Underwood and was a native of Washington, D. C.

The quaint old house, now the home of Mrs. Jennie Savage, was in the old time, the Doughty home. Samuel Doughty was a merchant. His store was where Jacob Wolfe's is now. Mr. Doughty had his home in Richmond in later years, and died there about a year ago.

The house where Mrs. Gibson lives, on Walnut street, was the Dill home. It is an old-time place, with colonial pillars to the portico. Mr. Dill was a cabinet maker, and went to Richmond many years ago.

The large white brick house on north Main Cross street, known as the Pritchett property, was built by Judge Williams, or rather the south end was. Judge John S. Newman built the north end. This was a grand mansion in its day. Judge Newman was a Quaker lawyer and for ten years a partner of Jessie Suddall. He was of the Hoover stock. His wife was Eliza, daughter

of Samuel Hannah; his daughter, Gertrude, married Ingram Fletcher, of Indianapolis. He was the first president of the Indiana Central railroad and held many other responsible positions. He removed to Indianapolis in 1860. Dr. Pritchett bought the house of Judge Newman. It was the Pritchett homestead for many years. Here Dr. Pritchett and his estimable wife passed their declining years. The house was inherited by the daughter, Miss Mary Pritchett.

Opposite the Pritchett house, on the east, is a frame house where Jeremiah Wayne Swafford lived the last thirty years of his life, and where he peacefully died last summer, at the age of eighty-four. Mr. Swafford was a pioneer of Wayne county and Justice of the Peace nearly all his life and up to the time of his death. He was widely known as a business man in Wayne and adjoining counties.

In the early days, before this large house was built, there were two small frame dwellings on the lot. One was the home of Rev. Mr. Rupe the father of attorney John Rupe, of Richmond. The other frame building was the home for awhile of Dr. Rose. His wife Henrietta Rose was a lady of attainment and a writer of some note. She was the author of a small volume entitled "Nora Wilmot; a Tale of Temperance and Woman's Rights," published in 1858. The frontispiece is a quaint old wood cut—"The Ladies' Knitting Party at Tradewells Saloon." The thread of the story runs through that period when Indiana had a prohibitory liquor law, which was declared unconstitutional by Judge Perkins of the Supreme Court of Indiana.

James Rariden, one of the eminent men of his time, lived where Mrs. James M. Hill now lives. The grounds included the lot where the Christian Church now stands. A summer house covered with vines and flowers and shubbery gave the spot an air of rural retreat. But this lovely spot was too much retired and Mr. Rariden moved into a brick house on west Main street. It was in this house that Mr. Rariden entertained Henry Clay when he made his tour through Indiana. A reception was held in the evening for the great Kentuckian. The children as well as the older people attended. Mr. Clay was very fond of children and kissed them all. Mrs. Ensley was then little Sarah Hamm and remembers being kissed. Mr. Clay said to little Gertrude

Newman, now Mrs. Ingram Fletcher: "My dear, you have a very pretty name, but it ought to be pronounced Jertrude." And to a boy he said: "You have a very large mouth, but that does not matter in a boy." As Mr. Clay had a large mouth this remark caused a hearty laugh all round. It was in this house that Mr. Clay authorized a committee to offer freedom to his body servant, the petted slave Charlie, who declined to leave his master. The house has changed owners several times in recent years and it is at present the home of Mr. and Mrs. Joshua Eliason. After Mr. Rariden left the rural retreat Rosswell Elmer and wife occupied it. They were the parents of Charles N. Elmer and Mrs. James Forkner.

John Finley, the poet, and for many years the Mayor of Richmond, when clerk of Wayne county court resided in a small house on Plum street, near the Elmer home. The cottage and extensive gardens of Mr. E. Y. Teas, the well known florist, was for years the home of Henry Noble, who now lives in Indianapolis. Two houses on an elevation north of the railroad, always attracting attention of travelers, are notable mansions of the olden time. The one on the west was built by Samuel Hannnah. James Forkner improved it and occupied it until he removed to Richmond. It is now the property of C. L. Porter, and the home of Thomas Clark. On the east of this is the mansion built by Daniel Strattan. He was a tanner by trade and a prominent citizen. Beautiful for situation is the fine old mansion south of the railroad, built by Jacob B. Julian. It was the family residence previous to his removal to Irvington. On the west of Mr. Seaton was the home of Jesse Stevens, a pioneer of Centerville. Mrs. John Paige, of Richmond, and Mrs. Henry Noble, of Indianapolis, were daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Stevens. The house is now the home of Mrs. Nichols. A large brick house on the south side of Main street, the home of Jesse Brumfield, was built by Martin Hornish, a shoe-maker and a prosperous citizen. Judge Stitt lived where H. H. Peelle now lives, and next, on the east, was the home of Judge Jesse Siddall. Farther east on Main street is a substantial brick house built by George W. Julian, which was the family residence for many years previous to removal to Irvington. Dr. Silas H. Kersey bought the property, and made it his family residence for several years. It was in this

house that Dr. Kersey died. It is now the residence of I. L. Houck. Opposite, on the north, on the site of the residence of George Sanders, stood one of the oldest houses of Centerville. Mrs. Rebecca Julian lived there at one time. Her husband, Isaac Julian, died and left her a widow with a family of children. She was a sister of Judge David Hoover, a pioneer of Wayne county, and the mother of George W. Julian. Across the street to the east is the brick house that was long the home of Dr. William F. King, deceased. He was an eminent physician and prominent citizen. The house is now the residence of his daughter, Miss Emilie King. North east, on the same square is an old frame house, one of the oldest now standing in Centerville. It was the residence of James B. Ray, afterwards Governor of Indiana. C. Cooney now resides there.

On west Main street, where H. C. Means now lives, was the residence of Martin M. Ray, a brother to Governor Ray. He was a lawyer and a merchant as well. His store was in the corner building occupied now by Tillson's drug store. Frederick Snider, a merchant, had his store where Mr. King now has a restaurant. On west Main street where Bert Horner now lives, is the house built by Thomas Gentry, a tanner and one of the substantial citizens. Lot Bloomfield built the house where Isaac Jenkins now lives. He was a merchant of the place. His wife was Elizabeth Talbot, a sister to Mrs. Hamm and Mrs. Dr. Pritchett. The Simon McConaha home was built by Dr. Pritchett, who occupied it before he bought the Judge Newman place. The old house with dormer windows, now the residence of Alfred Lashley, in the old time was the residence of Henry Beitzell. The old Burbank home was on the south side of Main street opposite the court house. The house was partially destroyed by fire in later years. Mr. Burbank was a merchant. The parlors and family apartments were up stairs over the store. The Burbank young people were well educated and were prominent in social circles. It was in this home that Oliver P. Morton was married to Lucinda Burbank.

Ambrose Burnside, afterwards a lawyer at Liberty, Union County, and a General of renown in the Union army, worked at the tailor trade in a building adjoining, and on the site of Dr. Gable's residence and office once stood a large hatter's shop

where the boy, Oliver P. Morton, learned his trade. Morton was born at Salisbury. He was left an orphan and brought by his aunts to Centerville when a child, where he learned the trade with an older brother. Early in life he attended the seminary here and Miami University, at Oxford, Ohio, and was always a profound student. The early years of Morton's married life were passed in a frame house on the north-east corner of south Main Cross street. The homestead known as the Morton mansion, on west Main street, was built by Jacob B. Julian. Mr. Julian was a tree planter, and his lawn was a landscape garden, where nature was permitted to rule. When Mr. Julian built his stately home near the railroad he sold this Eden spot to Oliver P. Morton. Here a liberal and unostentatious hospitality was dispensed by Morton and his amiable wife. It was while living in this house that Morton was elected Lieutenant Governor on the ticket with Henry S. Lane. Judge William A. Peelle bought the Morton mansion after his term as Secretary of State expired. Judge Peelle died there on July 1, 1902. The house is now the home of his daughter, Miss Martha L. Peelle.

Judge Charles H. Test lived on Main street where the town hall now stands. Mrs. James Rariden was his sister. It was considered that Judge Test, while eminent as a lawyer, was by nature preeminent and unequalled. He bore off the palm as the homeliest man in Indiana. Adjoining the school-house campus on the east is the old homestead of Stephen Crowe, one of the early blacksmiths of the place. Mr. Crowe sold the house to John Peele, an old settler, and Samuel Boyd, a retired farmer, bought the place from Mr. Peele and passed the remainder of his days there. The property is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Lashley. The house on the east, now the residence of J. A. Commons, was the home of Sylvester Johnson, now of Irvington, and a well-known horticulturist.

Many do not know that the substantial brick building on the north-east corner of Main street was, in the palmy days of Centerville, the court-house of Wayne county. It is now the business house of T. G. Dunbar, while the extension to the north, where Mr. Dunbar resides, was once the sheriff's house and jail. The extension on the east was the county offices.